Process. He also conveyed Israel's condemnation to 13 December attack on the Indian Parliament.

Delay in SAARC Conference

†2709. SHRI P.K. MAHESHWARI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 'SAARC' Conference organised in Kathmandu began one day after its scheduled time;

(b) if so, the reason therefor; and

(c) Government's reaction in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir; because of the late arrival of one participating Head of State.

(b) India agreed to the new timing for the Inaugural Session as proposed by Nepal, the host government.

Indo-China bilateral relations

2710. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether China has decided to accord high priority to develop and strengthen its relations with India on bilateral basis;

(b) if so, whether addressing a press conference on the 8th February, 2002, the Chinese envoy has pointed out that the Prime Minister of China had recently visited India with the objective of setting new directions for strengthening bilateral relations was satisfied with the outcome of the discussion with the Prime Minister;

(c) whether this is a welcome measure; and

(d) if so, to what extent relations between the two countries have further improved?

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (d) Government of India is committed to the development of friendly and good neighbourly relations with China on the basis of the principles of *Panchsheel*, mutual sensitivity to each others concerns and equality. This has been underscored during recent high level political exchanges between India and China, including during the visit of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji in January 2002 and the visit of External Affairs Minister to China in March-April 2002.

Both sides are taking steps to further promote the development of bilateral relations.

Prime Minister has been invited to visit China and has accepted the invitation. Dates for the visit will be settled through diplomatic channels.

China's Cooperation with India and Russia

2711. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether China has agreed to have a cooperation with India and Russia on issues like terrorism, international security and stability;

(b) if so, whether any working programme in this regard has been reached between the three countries;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) to what extent it would strengthen bilateral cooperation with all countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) India and China have agreed to establish an annual bilateral dialogue mechanism on counter-terrorism. India and China also have in place a process of foreign office consultations and a security dialogue.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.